



UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL
Newark, New Jersey

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 5, 2020

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University Hospital Erects ‘Succah’ For Jewish Festival

NEWARK, NJ — To help Jewish patients and staff observe the week-long Succot festival, University Hospital, for the first time, has erected a Succah tent that accords with the tenants of Jewish law. Dr. Nathan Zemel, an Orthodox Jewish rabbi who serves as one of the hospital’s community chaplains, conceived the initiative.

The weeklong festival, which runs this year from October 2-9, memorializes the Israelites who dwelled in temporary shelters, or “succahs” during the 40 years they wandered in the desert. Jewish law requires followers to leave the permanence of their homes, once a week during Succot each year, to spend time in a succah tent.

Zemel reflected on the fact that when he was earning his medical degree at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), it was difficult for Jewish students to observe the holiday without a Succah tent nearby. With the support of University Hospital leadership, he enlisted the help of Orthodox Jewish students at the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine to erect the tent in a parking lot outside the emergency room entrance.

The Essex County chapter of Hatzalah, an international volunteer emergency medical service organization, provided University Hospital’s Succah tent. It meets the height and width requirements stipulated under Jewish law, and is set away from any overhead structures. The roof is made of bamboo and reeds. Zemel indicates that the succah will be used primarily during lunch breaks, and because of public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, occupancy will be limited to four people.

“COVID-19 has played a spiritual role, one that underscores the meaning of Succot,” said Zemel. “We see that there is a power above us that does control, intervene and guide our lives, and that we show our trust in that higher power, rather than the permanent structures that we have built around us.”

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About University Hospital

University Hospital is part of one of the nation's leading academic medical centers and is the Level 1 Trauma Center for Northern New Jersey. Located at University Heights in Newark, University Hospital is a principal teaching hospital of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and a regional resource for

advanced services across many medical specialties. For more information about University Hospital, please visit www.uhnj.org.